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RUMICEA/USCENTCOM INTEL CEN MACDILL AFB FL
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RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHINGTON DC
RUEHKP/AMCONSUL KARACHI 8828
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SUBJECT: CONFIRMED AI OUTBREAKS IN POULTRY IN SOUTHERN PAKISTAN

Ref: 07 Islamabad 5349

11. (SBU) Summary: Pakistani authorities confirmed an outbreak of avian influenza (AI) in poultry on two commercial breeding farms near Karachi. The outbreaks are the first to occur in southern Pakistan during the 2007-2008 migratory bird season. To date, 91,000 chickens have died from the disease or been culled. There are currently no suspected cases of AI in humans. The Government of Pakistan (GOP) has initiated quarantine procedures and proposed regulating the poultry industry in an attempt to increase sanitation levels. End Summary.

12. (SBU) The National Reference Laboratory for Avian Influenza (NRLAI) confirmed on February 1 and 4 the presence of H5N1 avian influenza on two commercial poultry farms in Gadap, near Karachi. The confirmed cases occurred in a flock of four-week old birds. A combined 4,000 animals perished from the disease before containment measures were put into effect; 6,000 birds were subsequently culled. Animal health authorities have been notified of additional poultry deaths around Karachi, specifically in Sindh province's Thatta and Badin districts. Samples have been collected and sent to NRLAI for testing.

13. (SBU) The Gadap outbreaks are the first confirmed poultry outbreaks in southern Pakistan during the 2007-2008 migratory bird season. There has not been a confirmed case of AI in poultry in Karachi since April 2007. This migratory season's previous outbreaks all occurred in the north of the country. The first case occurred on October 26 on a commercial farm in Buttal, 150 kilometers (105 miles) to the north of Islamabad. 4,000 of the diseased 7-week old breeder flock died of H5N1 and 38,000 birds were culled. Animal health authorities confirmed two additional infections on commercial farms in Abbottabad, to the north of Islamabad, on November 1 and 20. A total of 21,000 birds were culled at both infection sites. H5N1 was also confirmed on December 3 at a commercial poultry farm in Murree, 50 kilometers to the north of Islamabad. 3,000 of the farm's 18,000 5-week old breeder flock died from the disease; the remaining 15,000 animals were culled. To date, 91,000 chickens have died from the disease or been culled.

14. (SBU) The Government of Pakistan (GOP) has urged all poultry farms to remain vigilant, improve sanitary conditions and report unusually high poultry mortality rates. Animal Husbandry Commissioner Rafiqul Hassan Usmani reported on February 3 that the GOP is considering closer regulation of the country's reported 26,000 commercial poultry farms. The majority of Pakistan's poultry

farms are clustered around urban areas. In many cases, there are no boundary walls separating flocks, increasing the likelihood of cross-farm contamination. There is currently no legal framework in place to enforce biosafety protocols on poultry farms. Usmani told local media that the GOP is considering an ordinance to regulate the sector, adding that the country should be on a "war footing" to contain the disease.

15. (SBU) Dr. Shakeel Mullick, Deputy Secretary of the Sindh Provincial Health Department, reported to local media on February 3 that workers from the affected farms were not suffering flu-like symptoms. Three poultry workers, previously admitted to the Karachi Civil Hospital for monitoring, are reportedly in good condition. The Director General of the Ministry of Health, Major General Shahida Malik, confirmed to Econ Counselor February 4 that there are currently no suspected human cases. She added that the GOP is carefully monitoring the health of those involved in poultry culling for signs of infection and implementing international avian influenza standards and precautions. To date, there has been one confirmed case of AI in humans in Pakistan, an individual who died of respiratory failure in Peshawar on November 28, 2007 (Reftel).

16. (SBU) Comment: The emergence of the disease in southern Pakistan does not come as a surprise. Historically, AI is first reported in the north of the country, gradually spreading south to the provinces of Punjab and Sindh. Poor sanitation conditions on commercial poultry farms continue to be one of the primary drivers of AI infection. Proposed regulation of the poultry industry is a step in the right direction. However, a broad set of policies, from the regulation of live bird markets to an enhanced public awareness campaign, is required to adequately prevent and control the spread of the virus. End Comment.

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